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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001208

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: MFA WORKING-LEVEL ASSESSMENT ON
POST-ELECTION IRAN

Classified By: Pol-Mil Counselor Anthony Godfrey, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Turkish MFA, at a working level, believes the Iranian regime, backed by an IRGC in the ascent, has successfully contained the opposition movement and that there will be no credible challenge to the ruling regime in the near term. Yet there is uncertainty and conflicting signals in the relationship between Supreme Leader Khamenei and Ahmadinejad. The MFA is cautiously optimistic about reports that the Iranian leadership is seriously considering an appropriate response to the P5 Plus 1 offer but noted that Iran will not be in position to provide a response on the nuclear issue before its cabinet is formed. The GOT will continue to express its strong concerns about the nuclear issue with Iranian leaders and urge Iran to take a constructive approach. Comment: Turkey continues to hold out hope that Iran will be willing to engage on the nuclear issue once a government has been formed. This optimism may reflect both wishful thinking and Turkey's belief that all options outside of dialogue will be profoundly destabilizing for Turkey and the region as a whole. End Summary and comment.

¶2. (C) During a briefing in which DIA analysts shared their analysis of political developments in post-election Iran, MFA Iran Desk Officer Mehmet Sekerci offered his own assessment of the elections and its aftermath. While Sekerci is by no means a senior official, he has been following developments in Iran on a day to day basis more closely than anyone in the MFA and his comments are consistent with the GOT leadership's ongoing approach with respect to its Iran policy. DIA's approach was part of our ongoing work to collaborate with Turkey in analyzing shared threats.

Opposition Contained, Reformists the Big Losers

¶3. (C) For the time being, Supreme Leader Khamenei has contained the opposition, and Sekerci did not expect another credible challenge to Khamenei's position or Ahmadinejad's presidency in the near term. The opposition has lost its momentum and does not appear to have the organization and leadership to mount the types of massive protests seen in the initial aftermath of the elections, which Sekerci asserted were nation-wide and not limited to Tehran.

¶4. (C) The biggest losers coming out of the elections, according to Sekerci's assessment, are the reformers. They were unable to run any credible presidential candidates and have no chance of changing the political make up of the Majles. Even more damaging were the show trials which disproportionally targeted the reformist camp.

IRGC in Ascent, Uncertainty Remains

¶5. (C) The election process was particularly interesting because it marked the first time that the deep rifts and rivalries among various factions have surfaced publicly, allowing observers to peer into the "closed box" of Iranian

politics. One of the surprises for Sekerci was how Supreme Leader Khamenei has apparently gone "all-in" with Ahmadinejad and the pro-Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps circle in the elections. This may be a reflection of the growing power of the IRGC. As evidence of IRGC's expanding power base Sekerci pointed to the bonyads system and how the IRGC has been making inroads over the past decade in establishing bonyads that have typically been dominated by the mullahs (he estimated that about 60% of bonyads are controlled by clerical groups) and benefiting from contracts issued by these bonyads.

16. (C) Despite Khamenei's support for Ahmadinejad in the elections, Sekerci found it even more surprising that Ahmadinejad appeared to contradict the will of Khamenei over the selection of the first vice president. Even after the Supreme Leader made clear that Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie, a relative of Ahmadinejad by marriage, was not suitable as the first vice president, Ahmadinejad still appointed Mashaie into the position. Ahmadinejad also reportedly dismissed the intelligence chief, Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejehei, a purported ally of the Supreme Leader, over an argument related to Mashaie's candidacy to become first vice president. Still, Sekerci expected Khamenei to remain in control of the regime. Sekerci predicted that Khamenei will maintain as his sole priority the survival of the regime based on the velayet-e faqih, or the guardianship of the Islamic jurists, and that Ahmadinejad and other players in the Iranian political system remain dispensable for the furtherance of regime survival.

Iran Considering Response on Nuclear Issue, Needs More Time

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17. (C) Sekerci relayed that the Turkish embassy in Tehran has been reporting, even subsequent to the elections and more vocal U.S. condemnation of the crack down against protesters that there are ongoing deliberations within the Iranian leadership about how (not whether) and when to respond to the P5 plus 1 offer. The MFA is cautiously optimistic that responding to the P5 plus 1 is still on the agenda of Iran's leadership. Sekerci noted that the Iranian government will still need to form a cabinet and until this process is complete, Iran will be, in effect, without an executive branch. The GOT will continue to express its strong concerns about Iran's nuclear program in any discussions with the Iranian leadership, Sekerci stated, and urge Iran to take a constructive approach on the nuclear issue. Options other than dialogue, Sekerci asserted, will be destabilizing for the region and will not be in U.S. or Turkey's interest.

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Silliman